

PEOPLES OF THE LAKE NYASA REGION

175 even competing with the Arusha for the inland trade.¹ At some uncertain date there were two migratory movements away from the original home of the Yao. The first was a scattering from Hill Yao to surrounding hills, possibly due to internal dissension.² The next movement was caused by an attack of the Makua between 1890 and 1890.³ One party moved northward, finally settling in Tanganyika, as has been mentioned. Four parties moved south into Nyasaland.

- (a) Achisi Yao, who first moved from Mkwinda to Mchiki hill, and then to Nyasaland, where they are represented by those under Katuli Native Authority.
- (b) Amasungu Yao, who first moved to Lianganga hill, near the Lotwisi river, and then to the south-east of Lake Nyasa, where their descendants are now under Mchankira Native Authority.
- (c) Amangochi Yao, first went to settle at Mangochi, near Fort Johnston. They were later driven out of Mangochi, by the last group, and scattered.
- (d) Amashinga Yao, first went to the vicinity of Mandimba hill, near the source of the Lujenda river. They were ousted from this fertile valley by the attacks of the Lomwa, and came into Nyasaland in four parties.

One party of Machinga Yao under Nkata (later called Jalasi, or Zarali) attacked the Yao at Mangochi, drove them south and themselves finally settled there. Another party under Nsumala came with Nkata as far as Mangochi, then turned off to Chisai hill in the Fort Johnston area. A third group, under Malima and Msumanja, moved down to the Domasi valley via Isale hill, where they were attacked by the fourth Machinga group, under Kawinga. The latter had also accompanied Nkata's party as far as Mangochi, then crossed the Shire river to the west; here they were attacked by the Maseko Nguni under Chidzonga and moved south-east to Chikala, which they occupied until defeated by the British. Liwunde, the brother of Kawinga, moved to the Shire river.

The Amangochi Yao, after they had been scattered by the Amashinga, settled some in the Chitunda part of Dedza district, some at Mount Zomba, some migrated to Ndirande hill near Blantyre, some to Soche hill, some to Chiradzulu, Ngolodi, Malawi, and Ndudu hills. These Amangochi Yao constitute about half the Yao population in Nyasaland.⁴

177 The Yao invasion of Nyasaland was not an organized military expedition, like that of the Nguni. The first immigrants came peacefully in small kinship groups. They took advantage of Nyanja factions to consolidate their position, until, by 1896, when the Church of Scotland Mission was established at Blantyre, the Yao were a ruling class dominating the earlier inhabitants.⁵ At the same time they vigorously carried on their slaving activities. In 1893 Thompson noted that the fertile country of the watershed between the Ruo and the Shire rivers was uninhabited because of Yao raids.⁶

The Yao of Nyasaland suffered from Nguni raids, but were never subject to them. Several tributes have been paid to their soldierly qualities,⁷ and indeed it took five years from 1891, when the Protectorate was declared, before the Yao were subdued and the slave trade, to which they had been principal parties with the Arusha, sup-

¹ Burton, 1873, p. 37.

² Mackal, 1922, p. 7; Murray, 1920.

³ Historical notes in unpublished administrative papers.

⁴ De Plessin, 1929, pp. 261 and 262.

⁵ Sharpe, 1897, p. 12, and Stigand, 1929.

⁶ Abdullah, 1929.

⁷ Thompson, 1880, p. 90.

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pressed. Two contingents of Sikha were sent unsuccessfully to take Kawinga's fortress in Chikala in 1894; Makanjira was defeated in 1894. Kawinga, Jalasi, Matipwiri, and Tambala in 1896.¹ They were later allowed to return, but they were not recognized as chiefs by the Administration.

The end of tribal wars and of slave-raids made large defensive settlements unnecessary, and the peace saw the splitting up of communities, which rendered the task of the Administration more difficult. The abolition of domestic slavery, by reducing the power of headmen, further contributed to the tendency to live in small scattered settlements. In 1912 the Nyasaland District Administration Ordinance was passed with the object of concentrating the villages into larger communities.

The first movement of Yao from Portuguese East Africa to Masasi took place about the end of the 1890's. According to one account they were originally expelled from the territory between Matsika's and Unangu by the Masoko Nguni.² Then the Makua attacked them, breaking up the tribe still more, so that they migrated north to Masasi, the south-west of the Makonde plateau, and the banks of the lower Ruvuma. At Masasi they were again attacked by Nguni, but defeated them, and then retired to the Makonde plateau, where they were again attacked by Nguni. There is a tradition that at some time after 1890 the region was toured by an emissary of the Sultan of Zanzibar, 'Bakiri', who gave the whole country to Matsika, a Yao chief, to rule from Newala. In the area between Masasi and the Ruvuma river the Yao are in a majority and politically supreme over their neighbours the Makonde, Makua, Ngindo, Matambwe, and Ndonde.³ At Mrua, on the Makonde plateau, there is a settlement of Yao who were rescued from the Nguni on the east shore of Lake Nyasa by Captain Engelhardt, and transferred there. These in outward appearance could hardly be distinguished from the Swahili of the coast.⁴

DEMOGRAPHY

The Yao population of Nyasaland has increased steadily but its relation to the total population has not increased:

1921		1937		1945	
Yao population	Percentage of total population	Yao population	Percentage of total population	Yao population	Percentage of total population
183,363	15.6	246,313	15.6	281,577	13.74

Even in the predominantly Yao areas the population is not homogeneous, either tribally or linguistically. In the three areas in which there are a large number of Yao (Kawinga and Liwonde of Zomba district and Nyambi of Fort Johnston), they represent roughly 48.6, 75, and 73 per cent. of the total population, the next most important section being Nguru (Luwero) immigrants from Portuguese East Africa.⁵ Some Nguru call themselves Yao when questioned.

The density in these areas is respectively 65.5, 32, and 52 per square mile.⁶ This

¹ Cadogan, 1898, p. 320; Mungam, 2, 1922, pp. 58, 120-4, 122-3; Scholer, 1893, p. 422.

² Livingston, 1874, p. 72.

³ Ibid. p. 48.

⁴ 1945 Census.

⁵ Wode, 1909, pp. 128-48.

⁶ Mitchell and Cannon, 1926, 1931, and 1945.

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182 completely exhausted or reduced to a mere trickle. The average annual rainfall over the last ten years is 29.75 in. The shores waters of Lake Pamolombe are well stocked with fish. Both districts are well wooded, with a large variety of timber trees. In the dry sandy soil where the population is unable to live for lack of water, the prevalent type is *tampe*. A line of foothills from Zomba to Chikala are conserved as Forest Reserves.¹

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

241 The Yao are chiefly agriculturists, and in the old days were also hunters. As they live largely in tsetse-infested areas, they do not keep cattle, except for a few herds near Fort Johnston and Zomba, in Nyanaland, and on the east of Lake Nyasa,² in the mountains of the Ravuma valley around Mataka's.³

439 Abdullah describes a time when the Yao were economically self-sufficient, making their own bark-cloth, weaving, burning herbs for salt, and working iron for the tools they needed. Nevertheless, the tradition of coastward journeys for trading with the Arabs was well developed before the Europeans came to the country. They used to trade cattle and salt from the Mangochi and Loure for tobacco and hoes, and in exchange for slaves they got from the Arabs gunpowder, guns, swords, beads, coloured cloths, earthenware, and foodstuffs.⁴ Slaving expeditions were among the most important activities of the chiefs.⁵ The old tradition of the absence of the men from the village owing to these expeditions, is continued in modern times by soldiers and labour migrants to Southern Rhodesia and the Union. These men send back remittances to the area, but the main population is supported by agriculture. Cash is needed for purchasing salt and cloth, for paying certain dues and fines formerly paid in kind—adultery compensation, diviner's and initiation fees—as well as for tax and rent. Consequently, while certain crops, such as tobacco and ground-nuts, are grown for cash, any food crop is liable to be sold in one form or another in local markets or by the roadside.

262 The food crops are maize, sorghum, finger millet, sweet potatoes, ground-nuts, legumes. Fish is an important article of diet. Eggs are believed to cause sterility and are only eaten by those outside the child-propagating age; milk is disliked and never consumed.⁶ *Termitis alata* (flying ants) are a much relished food when they come out on nuptial flights. Rice is considered a superior food, and is eaten when possible on ritual occasions.⁷

299 Tobacco is the main cash crop, with individual production under the supervision of the Agricultural Department. The average cash earned per grower in 1943-4 was £5. 3s. This is overwhelmingly an external trade. Ground-nuts, which are sold at government-controlled markets to licensed buyers, bring in only a few shillings a year to the average seller. Women obtain cash by selling beer. At the lake shore the fishing industry is very important. Natives owning big nets are said to make between £10

¹ Murray, 1932, pp. 147-48.

² Unless otherwise stated, the information is from J. C. Mitchell, and relates to the Yao of south Nyanaland.

³ Livingston, 1874, pp. 71 and 80.

⁴ Young, E., 1877, p. 100.

⁵ See Livingston, 1874, p. 62; Young, E., 1877, p. 120; Thompson, 1880, p. 78; Schmitz, 1882, p. 420; Moushram, 2, 1889, pp. 36-7; Lamm, 1924, pp. 37-7.

⁶ Schmitz, 1882, p. 34.

⁷ Schmitz, 1882, p. 34.

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expressed also in the speeches by the marriage sureties. The couple are exhorted to refer disputes to the sureties, and to consult the diviner in case of sickness.¹ After the rite these two sureties have special responsibilities towards the couple; grievances are referred to them, and they must be present when adultery cases are heard in court. If the marriage witness ceremony has not been performed, the relationship is not regarded as legal and no adultery compensation can be claimed by the husband.

Divorce used to be a private affair, which was merely signaled by one party giving to the other an arrow as a token of separation.² Nowadays all divorce cases go to court. The woman is usually asked to choose between her husband and the adulterer, and the compensation paid to the former, if she decides to leave him, is higher—amounting to about 100. A man can be sent away from the village by his wife's kin, but if he has given no grounds for divorce he can claim compensation and will also take back any gifts made to his wife. A few small gifts to his mother-in-law are not reclaimed. Divorces are easily obtained and frequent. Grounds for the divorce of a man may include failure to pay hut tax, one of the specific duties of the husband.

The custom of making a marriage payment is recorded by Johnson³ (on the east coast of Lake Nyasa) as a relatively new adoption. When given it is divided between the bride's father, mother, and mother's brother and brother.⁴

SLAVERY

Domestic slavery was an important institution in the Yao social system. Slaves were obtained by capture, purchase, or in compensation for injury.⁵ A man would pay a debt by giving slaves (wives or members of his matrilineal kin group) to his creditors.⁶ A man might voluntarily enslave himself to a man having charge of many women, as a means of obtaining a wife.⁷ The children of a free man and a slave woman were not emancipated, as their father could not take them from the village of their mother's master, who had the right to sell them.⁸ Slaves took part in the ordinary life of the village; women slaves ranked as junior wives of their masters and shared the usual work of women. Men might be supplied with guns for hunting or might accompany their masters to war, trade for them, spin, weave, sew, make baskets.⁹ The institution of domestic slavery was an expression of a dominant motif in Yao culture—the association of status with a large number of dependents. Its abolition by the British was in itself a major blow to the prestige and authority of the chiefs.

Information about the social organization of the Yao in Portuguese East Africa is scanty, but it is in agreement with what is known of the Nyasaland Yao; Heckel, who knew the Yao in Lindi district, Tanganyika Territory, confirms the correctness of Stanner's account of the South Nyasa Yao.

The Yao came into Nyasaland in small parties of kinmen. Their experience and their superior weapons soon enabled them to dominate the Nyanja among whom they settled, and today they dominate the population of the Southern Province. They are organized into loose groups of villages, under petty, independent chiefs. They seem

¹ Stanner, *op. cit.*, p. 225; Hyde, *ibid.*; Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-73; Macdonald, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 237.

Werner, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-32.

² *ibid.*, pp. 70-7.

³ Stanner, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

⁴ Stanner, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

⁵ Werner, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-32; Stanner, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

⁶ Sigaud, *op. cit.*, p. 100 (not a reliable source).

⁷ Macdonald, *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 126-7.

⁸ Werner, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

⁹ *Ibid.*

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office tended to become hereditary. Each councillor had his own village which he administered as a headman. A second set of officials were the court assessors, *mapungu*, who, unlike the councillors, were not in charge of villages of their own in addition to their court duties. Their office was not hereditary and they were chosen for their wisdom and their debating ability. They lived at the court of the chief and their main duty was to sift the evidence in the judicial cases which came before him. 63

The village headmen were expected to send elephant tusks to the chief (receiving small gifts in return), and to invite him to a yearly beer drink. Like the chief, the village headman governed through a council of the most important men in his village. They constituted a kind of village court over which he presided, and in the old days he could give capital sentence, or award a fine of as many as four slaves. Appeal from his decision lay to the court of the superior headman, or to the chief. Important cases would be reported direct to the chief. Most crimes would be settled by compensation. In cases of murder, several slaves were paid to the kin of the victim, and a fine for spilling blood to the chief. When compensation was handed over, the recipient always returned some part of it as sign that friendship was restored. [62]

M MacDonald's further account of the treatment of crime shows how weak was the political organization, in spite of the apparent orderliness of the system of inferior and superior courts. A murderer caught red-handed might be killed at once. If captured alive he might be ransomed on payment of a fine of from four to twenty slaves, some of whom might be killed to accompany the dead. If the murderer escaped a relative of his would be captured and ransomed. This applied to murders occurring among parties friendly to one another and living in the same village. If the murderer was from another village, the injured village, if strong enough, would fall upon the other and kill and enslave the inhabitants. If not strong enough, the chief might be called in to help to annihilate the guilty village. 646

MODERN ADMINISTRATION

In the whole of Nyasaland there must be between thirty and forty Yao chiefs. In the districts of Liwonde, Fort Johnston, and Zomba, where 60 per cent. of the Yao population is concentrated (1931 boundaries), there are at least fifteen such chiefs. Not all those who have the rank of chief in the old Yao system are recognized as Native Authorities or even as Sub-Native Authorities by the Nyasaland Administration, and many Sub-Native Authorities would be full chiefs in the Yao system, and quite independent of the Native Authorities under whom they are placed. 631
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Nowadays the chief has lost many of his former claims to status. He no longer has monopoly of the trade to the coast, for goods are brought in by Indian traders and bought by African tobacco growers or returned labour migrants. He can no longer use his slaves to increase his wealth by running slaving expeditions. His tribute of food and ivory has ceased, and he can no longer entertain lavishly, but he is still expected to give burial cloths and to make gifts to headmen on their succession to office. Some of his councillors have been made court assessors, and are paid for those duties, but others are expected to work for him unpaid. Some chiefs do reward councillors who retain their traditional status but are not officially recognized as assessors by the

¹ MacDonald, *ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 156-8; *Stanley*, c. 1922, p. 279.

² MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-1.

439 that the Yao occupied in Central Africa as middlemen and traders. As far back as 1798 Lacerda described the Yao rôle as active traders. They bartered ivory, slaves, beeswax and tobacco with the Arabs along the East Coast of Africa for guns, gun-powder, cloth and beads. We cannot easily estimate what proportion of the population was engaged in whole-time slaving and trading. The larger proportion must have found it necessary to cultivate their gardens of finger-millet and sorghum in the rainy season to supply them with the major food crops. It seems likely that slave-raiding and trading were occupations mostly followed during the dry season.

The Yao therefore had become accustomed to a variation of activities and division of labour, at least a century before the Whites came to Nyasaland. Their wants at this time had already become sufficiently diversified to include cloth, beads, gun-powder and guns. All these trade goods are more durable than the foodstuffs which are the measure of wealth among a people who support themselves entirely by their own produce. But the individual want for these trade goods was limited, and the Yao used their surplus rather as capital for trading farther inland with other tribes.

436 There is considerable evidence, both from my informants and
439 the writings of early travellers, that these trade goods—ivory,
439 cloth and slaves—came to be used as currency, and most people
567 recognized a fixed relationship between the three commodities.
A female slave could be exchanged for an amount of calico or
ivory that was constant over fairly large parts of Central Africa;
the value of a tusk of ivory could be expressed in calico in the
same way. By enterprise, therefore, in trading and raiding,
439 an individual could accumulate wealth in the form of calico, guns,
556 beads, ivory or slaves. But the personal consumption of trade
567 goods is of necessity limited, so that the Yao preferred to accumu-
late their wealth in the form of slaves. The reason for this lies
in the general political structure of the early chiefdoms, which I
describe later. Slaves were not only labourers and serfs; they
also increased the military and political power of their masters.
At the same time slaves could be sent to the coast in a caravan and
bartered for cloth, or, since they were always prized, they could
be used to settle claims for compensation from aggrieved neigh-
bours. The slave trade therefore, although related to domestic

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slavery in that a trader could at any moment send some of his own slaves to the coast, was actually quite a separate institution. 556 567

Although the advent of the White Administration stopped both domestic slavery and the slave-trade to the coast, both of which were vitally important elements in Yao economy, it did nothing to decrease or reduce the variety of the wants of the Africans. On the contrary, it obviously increased those wants. The missionaries, who were the first Whites to settle in Nyasaland, were forced to import large quantities of cloth and beads so that they could buy foodstuffs and pay their labourers. They quite unintentionally, therefore, became competitors with the Yao in this trade. By some accounts their goods were both superior and cheaper. As early as 1878 the African Lakes Company was sponsored by the Church of Scotland Mission, so that it could take over the trading part of their dealings with the Africans. The planters and traders who began to settle in the highlands after 1890 brought more and more cloth, beads and other trade goods into Nyasaland to pay wages and buy foodstuffs. 437 797

When the Protectorate was proclaimed in 1891 and the Administration started to put down domestic slavery and the trade in slaves to the coast, the monopoly of trade in goods fell directly into the hands of the Whites. After 1893, when coinage was introduced, the economy of the country rapidly changed from one based on barter with slaves and ivory as the main outgoing commodities, and slaves, calico, beads and brass rings as the incoming commodities, to an economy in which the wants had become even more diversified. In 1895, the *British Central African Gazette* could record: 567 436 437

The wants of the people of this part of the world not long ago were limited to sufficient calico to clothe the family, but in one short year their wants now include boots, size and quality a minor point, turbans, coats, and in fact at a distance the half-naked native of yesterday has the appearance of Sikh soldiery.¹

That the Yao took to the use of money is illustrated by the Acting Commissioner's statement in 1897: 'The Yao thoroughly appreciate having a currency. It has proved, in fact, a great step towards civilizing the native of this part of Africa. He is now able to accumulate his earnings, which formerly in the days of a 438

¹ Vol. i, 2 (Sept. 26th, 1894).

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village headman and had to administer his slaves and relatives in his village in the same way as a village headman.¹ MacDonald shrewdly observes :

Where the chief sees occasion to interfere with his subordinates he generally consults his own interest. He will say to a headman, 'I see that you have been behaving badly to that subject of yours. You cannot get on with him: he must leave you and come and dwell in my own village.' The chief thus secures another servant.²

Another writer observed, 'As a chief's power consists of the number of his subjects the loss of a man is a serious matter.'³

A village headman also tried to strengthen his position against the chief and against other village headmen by attracting to himself as many followers and dependants as he could. The process whereby a man might increase his status is described as follows :

However large the settlement may become, the man that is first in the field is the chief or headman. In course of time he adorns his position by acquiring wealth. He may shoot some buck and get possession of their skins. With these he goes to the Mangoni country and buys slaves. An old person he obtains for a single skin, but a young slave costs two, and women cost much more than men. The female slaves thus bought are his junior wives and he keeps them busy in hoeing the farm, and all such female duties. The male slaves he employs in farming, building, making baskets, sewing garments and such masculine pursuits. He keeps all these persons strictly at their duties, and at the same time welcomes an opportunity of selling them at a profit. If his daughters were unmarried, he would give them slave-husbands. The natives aim at 'replenishing the earth and subduing it'. As it is no expense for them to rear families, they are all desirous to have many children.

Besides this increase of the village from the chief's own resources, there may be an accession of freemen. After the settlement is begun, a man may come to its founder and say, 'I wish to live with you.' The village chief gives him permission and calls him 'younger brother'. The newcomer brings his family, builds a house, and cultivates a farm in the same way as his chief. A freeman may leave his present chief and take up his abode with another, whose subject he becomes. His former chief has no longer any authority over him

¹ MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 154.

² MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 155-6.

³ Hynde, R. S., 'Among the Machinga People', *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, viii (1891), 656-63.

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tenance of the whole state under a new king,¹ but the Yao political units seem to have split into two factions when divisions appeared within them. The dissident faction left the parent chiefdom and established itself somewhere else as an independent entity. 175 643

The picture my informants have given me substantiates MacDonald's account, though his contact was mainly with Mangoche and not with Machinga Yao. My informants, however, placed greater emphasis than he did upon the importance of trade with the coast. A slave-trading trip was not a venture which the ordinary village headman could undertake with equanimity. The journey to the coast, to Quilimane or to Kilwa, was long and arduous, and strong military protection against bandits was needed. A caravan could only be sent by a chief or someone of like status, so that the coastal trade became the monopoly of the chiefs. Headmen who had ivory and slaves to send to the coast included them in the chief's caravan. When it returned, the headmen were able to collect calico and beads to the value of their contribution. Gun-powder also seems to have been a chief's monopoly. Thus, in fact, he did have some physical control over the military activities of his subject village headmen, since he could withhold supplies of gun-powder if he wished. But in a society where minor chieftains were inimically poised against each other, the maxim 'a chief without people is nothing' had much more significance than it has to-day: a village headman's ultimate sanction was that he could withdraw his support from one chief and give it to another. 175 439 484 567 622 643

THE EFFECTS OF WHITE CONQUEST

It was into a society thus organized that the first Missionaries came. I have already described how the Missionaries, by taking in runaway slaves, and by occasional armed combat, entered into political relationships with the chiefs. With the establishment of the Protectorate, the policy, clearly expressed in Sir Harry Johnston's letter,² was to stamp out slavery. This was done in numerous campaigns against the Yao chiefs³ so that by 175 643 648

¹ See Gluckman, M., 'Succession and Civil War among the Bemba: An Exercise in Anthropological Theory', *Human Problems*, xvi (1954), 6-25.

² See fn., p. 29.

³ See Chap. II, pp. 29-30.

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began to appear in the Territory. The chief in this situation had the same wants as his subjects but was in no way able to satisfy them. He was precluded by his position from becoming a labourer and thus securing a cash income, while his subjects, until recently dependent on his monopoly for their wealth, had been drawn into the new economy of the Protectorate and were comparatively affluent.

The cessation of warfare and slavery thus affected the prestige of the chiefs seriously. The Administration's policy was at first to impose a fine of guns on those who broke rules. In July 1894, for example, Chapola village on the south-west corner of Lake Malombe was fined 30 guns for being in possession of slaves.¹ Later the Administration introduced an ordinance requiring the registration and licensing of guns, and many guns were confiscated on account of breaches of this regulation. Not only were the Yao disarmed, but the Administration also punished those who broke the peace. At the same time the Government was pursuing an active policy against domestic slavery. For example, in the village of Chapola mentioned above, 26 slaves were released. The slaves, formerly bound to their masters by the physical sanction of being liable to death at his hands in cases of desertion, were now liberated. It is not surprising to find the Collector at Mlanje reporting, in 1895, that the power of Kuntirimanja and Matipwiri was failing, and that they were losing people.²

Statements of informants confirm that slaves were then starting to leave their erstwhile masters to set up villages of their own. In 1904, the Administration reported: 'The tendency is for the old large communities to be broken up; for the small man to collect a surrounding of friends and go off and build new hamlets in other localities.'³

From my own investigations, there appear to have been two possible reasons for this. First, communities may formerly have lived in consolidated groups in order to protect themselves from slave-raiders and other assailants. With the disappearance of the slaver and of war, the bond of the need for security would,

¹ B.C.A. Gazette, i, 10 (July 28th, 1894).

² B.C.A. Gazette, ii, 8 (June 15th, 1895).

³ *The Annual Report of the Territory, 1903-4*, quoted by S. S. Murray (ed.), *Handbook of Nyasaland*, Crown Agents for the Colonies (London, 1932), 188.

The Yao Village

175 therefore, be weakened, and the component parts of the village
 567 scattered. This is what the Administration argued when it
 621 wrote about the split-up of communities: 'This tendency is to
 648 some extent gratifying, in that it originates in the native's sense
 of his complete security under the existing Government.'¹ I
 have not much evidence that this is true, and in fact do not think
 it is. Second, there is little doubt from my village histories that
 the slave-groups attached to various village headmen were desert-
 ing their former masters and setting up independent villages.

175 It is significant that the report speaks of the 'old large com-
 361 munities'. Duff MacDonald, writing of the Blantyre area in
 621 the period 1877-81, says: 'Usually the natives live in small
 648 villages containing 10 or 11 huts, occasionally in large villages
 containing three times as many. They do not like to pack
 themselves closely. In time of peace few villages contain more
 than 100 people.'² Hynde, writing of the Domasi area, says:
 'Sometimes a village consists only of five or six huts; more
 commonly twelve or twenty and rarely above thirty. The
 chief's village at Domasi consists of more than 100 houses but
 that is an exceptional case. The villages occur at intervals of
 quarter to one mile.'³ In July 1895, the Collector at South
 Nyasa made a census of all the villages on the west bank of the
 Shire (64 villages). These were mainly Yao, but also included
 some Nyanja. The modal size of villages, calculated from his
 published figures, is 26 huts.⁴ The reports of MacDonald and
 Hynde agree well, although they describe different areas. The
 Collector's average was slightly larger, but one is not sure that
 he has not included two or three settlements under one headman.
 A village, Changali, was marked as having 217 huts, but a note
 indicated that they were scattered. Also the numerical accuracy
 is not above question because a large proportion of hut totals end
 in 0 or 5, indicating estimation rather than enumeration. From
 my own observation, the arithmetic mean of a sample of 37 villages
 in two separate areas was 11 huts (mode was 8 huts).

It seems, therefore, that the optimum size for Yao villages
 has always been about 10 to 15 huts, and that the disintegration

¹ *Annual Report of the Territory, 1911-12*, Murray, *Handbook*, 128.

² MacDonald, *Africana*, i, 145.

³ Hynde, R. S., 'Among the Machinga People'.

⁴ *B.C.A. Gazette*, ii, 3 (Sept. 1895).

622 *amilasi* is used for bamboos and once an informant when pressed
 643 told me a tale of a group of people who in dire starvation ate
 614 bamboo leaves and were thenceforth called after the bamboos.
 This story, however, was discredited by others and I pass it off
 as unimportant. There is, however, some evidence that the
 words *apiri amilasi*, *ambewe* and so on, are commonly used in
 Nyanja, and possibly amongst the Lakeside Tonga who were once
 part of the Marawi peoples, for objects other than clan-names.

614 Informants say that people with the same clan-name could not
 562 marry in the past,¹ so that the clan appears to have had the
 characteristics of an exogamous descent group. The position
 to-day is vastly different. Not only do people take the clan-
 names of their fathers, but many young people do not even
 know their clan-names at all.

614 At this point I should make it clear that the modern confusion
 611 about clan-names is no doubt partly due to the emphasis placed
 567 on patrilineal descent by the purveyors of White culture, the
 Administrators and the Missionaries, and also by the same
 emphasis in Islamic tradition which has influenced most Yao
 groups. Another factor in the situation is that slave descent still
 markedly affects social relationships in modern Nyasaland. Its
 significance here is that when a man took a slave-wife in the old
 days, his children by her took his clan-name, and not hers.
 Patrilineal descent of the clan-name therefore tends to point to
 the slave origin of a person. People who are able to point to
 a freeman ancestry are proud of this fact and are proud to be
 able to claim a clan-name associated with a long line of matri-
 lineal ancestors, particularly if there were some well-known men
 among them. On the other hand, I found it a fairly safe indica-
 tion that, if I could find no information about an ancestress,
 particularly her clan-name, then I was dealing with a group
 descended from a slave. A third factor is that some people
 614 explained their lack of knowledge of a clan-name by the state
 611 of social unrest and confusion at the end of the last century.
 As a result of the incursions of the Ngoni, Nguru and slave-
 raiding Yao and Arab groups, and finally the punitive expeditions
 of the British and the Portuguese, villages were destroyed and
 groups annihilated. People lost contact with their relatives, even

¹ Confirmed by Hynde, R. S., 'Marriage and relationship among the Yao', *Nyas News*, vii (1895), 217-18.

622 robes (a gown not unlike a woman's dressing-gown), wears a
 554 bright-coloured turban, and has one or two men walking behind
 292 him, he is a rather important village headman. One particular
 item of clothing in the Kawinga, Liwonde and Nyambi areas, is
 the scarlet headband which some village headmen may wear.
 I shall discuss this later in the context of the competition of
 village headmen for rank.

622 Another external characteristic of rank, which seems to have
 554 disappeared with the changing economic structure of Nyasaland,
 411 was the carrying of knives (*nsinjo*) by important village headmen.
 Previously, status was indicated by the type and size of knife
 carried in public. The chief usually carried the largest and most
 ornate. The knife taken from Kawinga on his surrender in
 Portuguese East Africa was about 18 inches long and had a
 decorated ivory handle. Smaller knives of similar pattern be-
 longed to his headmen.¹ Nowadays, many young commoners
 carry knives two or even three feet long, made from the broken
 blades of motor-car springs.

622 The right of important village headmen to build fences² at
 554 the back of their huts is also a mark of prestige which seems to
 351 have lost its significance. About 50 years ago only important
 headmen had the right to erect a fence at the back of their huts.
 [56] This fence, made of tall grass about six feet high, enclosed the
 grain stores and other food supplies of the household and formed
 a private compound in which the headman's wife and slaves
 carried on their daily tasks.³ It seems likely that private com-
 pounds and slavery were positively associated, so that only the
 important village headmen who had many slaves found it
 necessary to build fences. All chiefs and most important head-
 [88] men to-day still erect these fences. Those who hold initiation
 rights are obliged to build them because, when the initiands
 return from the seclusion phase of the initiation ceremony, they
 are supposed to spend one night in the headman's private com-
 pound before going back to their villages. But nowadays, minor
 village headmen and commoners also frequently build these

¹ See fn. 4, Chap. II, p. 38.

² *Lambye*, pl. *ndenje*. The enclosed space or 'compound' is *cimbundi*.
 Typical hut compounds are depicted on Plate IX (a) and (b), facing p. 206.

³ MacDonall suggests that the common term *kuyeto* for woman is derived
 from the adverb *kuyeto*—on the other side (of the fence).

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the significance of this formulation of his position is clear. It is when he shows partiality that the village under him is likely to break up. If he sides with his children his matrilineal kin are almost sure to move out; if he sides with his matrilineal kin, his children are likely either to return to their matrilineal village or, if they are adult, split off to set up a village of their own. The situation is precarious for the headman and it is very difficult for him to avoid a split in the village if he cannot keep the two opposed groups at peace.

My investigations show that few villages have contained patrilocally-linked groups through the lives of two village headmen, unless these groups were descended from slaves. When the headman dies his successor assumes his name and social rôle. He also assumes the position of father towards the remaining children, who are in fact his cross-cousins. But his relationship towards them is not the same as that of father to children. The intimate link of the blood tie has been lost and the relationship becomes formalized. As more and more headmen succeed the genealogical link between the patrilocally-linked groups and the dominant matrilineage becomes more and more remote, and the relationship becomes more and more casual. What usually happens is that shortly after the death of the headman and father, the patrilocally-linked group takes exception to what the new headman does or says and moves off to found a village of its own. The case history I quoted earlier¹ brought this out clearly. The new headman had had intercourse with the wives of his 'son'. The son complained to the arbitrators in the dispute that 'he should have been as a father to me, and he is not'. The result was that the son refused compensation, and moved out of the village with his sisters to build on his own. When this happens the father-son relationship between the two villages is preserved and perpetuated, but the link is entirely formal and co-operation between them is limited to mutual attendance at funerals.

PATRILATERALLY-LINKED GROUPS AS THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

Slave-groups in a village are usually linked patrilocally to the dominant lineage. This is because the headman who was usually the captor of the slaves kept the women as concubines. They were given quasi-child status in the village, so that their children

¹ 'The Split of Cikumba Village', see Chap. V, p. 127.

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- 567 were called *yisikulu* (grandchildren) by the headman, who in turn
 613 was called *ambuje* (grandparent or master) by the slaves. The
 621 grandchild-grandparent relationship became fused with the
 [608] master-slave relationship as the use of the term *ambuje* for master
 suggests. The slave descendants as a rule have no relatives in
 the neighbourhood. The Yao always redeemed uterine kin
 whom they found in slavery by replacing them with other slaves,
 usually taken or bought from the Nyanja, Ngoni or Bisa.
 Where there are slave-groups in a village to-day, they have
 frequently been bought or captured in distant places, so that
 their kinsmen have been unable to trace them. How much this

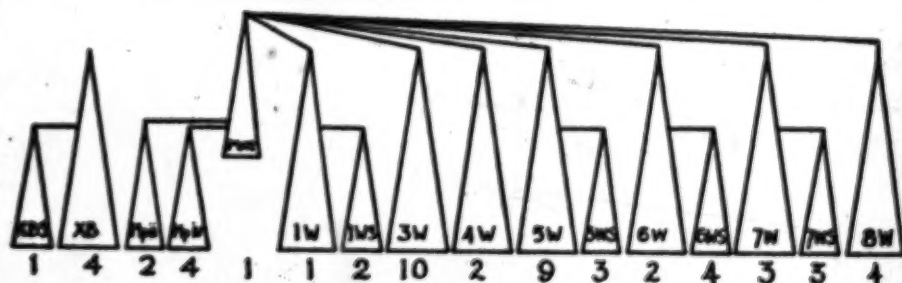


DIAGRAM 5. THE OWNERSHIP OF HUTS IN MPUMBE VILLAGE.

has prevented slave-groups from leaving Yao villages I cannot say. Certainly before the White conquest members of a slave-group could only leave their captor's village at the risk of death. But after the White conquest it seems that many of the slave-groups left to set up their own villages. Many, on the other hand, no doubt for personal reasons, stayed with their captors in their villages, and are there to-day. In Cikoja's village, for example, there are six of these groups. Some are not very large, but only 20 of the 46 huts are owned by members of the dominant matrilineage who are not married to descendants of slaves. Eight are owned by members of the dominant matrilineage who have married slave descendants, and the remainder, 18 huts, are owned by members of the slave-groups who have married outsiders. This is a typical distribution of hut ownership. At one extreme is the pure matrilineal village such as Ali Kasunka's and at the other is the village in which the dominant lineage is barely represented. A village of this type was Mpumbe

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when I visited it in 1947.¹ The basic structure of this village is set out in Diagram 5. Here the headman* was the last surviving member of the dominant matrilineage. The founder of the village, his mother's brother, had thirteen slave concubines. Some of these were barren but others produced children to give this complex structure. In this village the 55 huts were arranged in 16 different affiliations. The details are set out in Table XXIX. These groups were held together by Mpumbe IV, old, blind and doddering as he was. The virtual leader of the village was his elder brother's son, a man in his late forties or early fifties. When Mpumbe died, late in 1948, the people said that it was because of the sorcery of his brother's son who wished to take over the name of the village. This led to a dispute, which ended in the brother's son's leaving to found a new village about 15 miles away. A distant sister's son, as I have said, succeeded to the headmanship, and the reduced village was reunited under this new leader.

However, this is an extremely unusual type of village as most villages, if they are not simple matrilineal groups, have only one patrilocally-linked group living with them. The reasons for this are firstly, that if patrilocally-linked matrilineages develop at all in the modern villages, they move out very soon after the death of their progenitor, and, secondly, that there are very few of the old slave-raiders' villages left intact.

CROSS-COUSIN AND OTHER KINDS OF INTRA-VILLAGE MARRIAGES

A most important factor in the welding of patrilocally-linked groups to the dominant matrilineage is marriage. The tradition of cross-cousin marriage is very strong among the Yao. A person may marry either type of cross-cousin but in practice preference is given to a father's sister's daughter—i.e. the woman is married to her mother's brother's son. There is a special term for cross-cousins, *ashidani*, which is used by either male or female talking to either sex. Between cross-cousins, especially cross-sexually, there is a joking-relationship which may vary all the way from ribald joking to sexual advances. Some of my male informants say that sexual intercourse may take place between cross-cousins

¹ See also Chap. VI, p. 161, and Chap. III, p. 39.

² He died late in 1948 and was succeeded by a distant 'sister's son' from the village of his perpetual son, Ngongondo.

[Text continues on p. 199]

769 supposed to be the abode of spirits. Except in the case of chiefs, the Yao never make any erections over their graves, like the Anyanja grass shelters, and the present-day Mohammedan earth imitations of Swahili tombs.

766 Chiefs, and the more important headmen, are usually buried in their own villages. Over the grave, a grass hut with a veranda is erected; the hut is covered with calico, and guns were formerly set in as veranda posts. Guns and ivory used to be buried with the corpse but these Yao, I am told, never practiced the barbarous custom of burying slaves with their chiefs. Information of the death of a chief was always conveyed to other chiefs by slaves who were kept by the recipient of the message.

[567]

Since the time of the old Malemya, the corpse of a chief always lies with its head in the direction of the old chief's grave. The grave is swept around, and the house pulled down as in the case of an ordinary man, but the grave-hut is rebuilt every year and never forgotten.

Since the burial of the dead is more or less correlated with the idea of planting seed from which progeny will spring, the natives will not bury a leper, believing that if they did so, leprosy would spring up all around them. Persons dying of an epidemic disease such as small-pox are dealt with in the same way. In these cases and in that of a man dying of ordeal poison, the body is enclosed in a mat and put up in a tree, a manner of disposing of the dead common among the Anguru and some Anyanja. Concerning death from dropsey, similar precautions are taken to those in the instance of a woman dying in childbirth,¹ and a tube is put down to the body from the surface of the ground.

A leper feeling that the end is near, will ask to be put in a hut built outside the limits of the burial ground. Here, provided with water and food for a few days, he will wait to die near the graveyard wherein he knows he cannot be buried.

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Anyone who is wounded with a spear or any other weapon is not taken into the village, but is kept in a hut in the bush. If death results, the mourning ceremonies differ somewhat from the ordinary rites and are much curtailed.

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Initiation Ceremonies. Under this heading I propose to deal with the three ceremonies, *Lupanda*, *Chiputs* and *Litiso*. They are occasions of great importance in the life of the native and their educative effect for the good of the tribe is far reaching.

At *Lupanda* (*Ndangala*) the young boys attend; at *Chiputs* the young girls go through their initiation and a side ceremony for young married men takes place, while *Litiso* celebrates the first quickening with child. All the ceremonies are included in the word *Ungapu*. Macdonald in *Africana* while referring to "the mysteries"² gives scant information about the ceremonies and has, presumably, without much knowledge of what goes on, condemned these customs like many others as furthering "abused superstitions." He has failed to recognize that they are occasions when a large amount of useful advice is imparted, good manners are insisted on, and tribal custom is made known. Sexual questions are dealt with in these mysteries, and, though mixed up with a large amount of superstition, a

¹ Vide supra, p. 220.

² Op. cit., vol. 3, ch. 7.

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for witchcraft was carried out by strangling with a piece of calico at a place appointed for the purpose some miles from the chief's village.

There was no case against a man who seduced an unbetrothed girl, the latter being considered entirely at fault.

After divorce, the children always remained with the mother. The man left his wife after the case, saying, "I will take my spear and some of the goats and chickens, but the children will always know their father."

Murder was a question of compensation to the deceased's relatives and was not punished by death.

Stealing was a serious offence but many who were found guilty were rather despised than punished. The thief with the stolen goods tied about his body but otherwise stripped naked would be driven through the village and prodded with sticks to the sound of drums and hoots of derision. Most crimes, however, might be punished by exacting compensation. Payment took the form of goods or slaves. In the case of murder, the accused might have to pay several slaves to the deceased's relatives, and in addition, a fine to the chief for spilling blood, consisting perhaps of one slave. The amount of compensation expected was mentioned by the plaintiff in the case. One of the expressions used was, "My compensation must cover an ant hill," meaning enough slaves, standing hand in hand, to surround an ant hill; ant hills in this country are sometimes very big. If a man had no slaves, he would send his relatives or he himself might be forced to become the slave of the plaintiff. There is a saying about this practice:

Chibumbili wakubwile wakubwile wakubwile

The monkey they tied (with) tail his (own).

Slaves passed over to a man in payment for crime became free men; they were an addition to the village and might even be adopted in place of a murdered individual.

When compensation was made by the defendant to the plaintiff, the latter always returned some part of it as a sign that friendship was again established.

Goods or money received in compensation for murder, i.e. blood money, might not go for the purchase of food or clothing. Detection of a guilty party by means of magic and proof of guilt or otherwise by ordeal poison are dealt with elsewhere.

Bluffing anyone into giving something, obtaining goods by false pretence, was not considered a crime, as anyone was "in the game." For instance, a party of youths would waylay a man with a load of fish, saying they had been ordered by their headman to commandeer it. If the man parted with his fish, so much the worse for him; if he showed fight, he was respected and friendship made with a give-and-take of fish and snuff. Such bluffing is called *hude mame*, "to eat with them." To add to their appearance of *hude mame*, the party might have secretly borrowed some well-known article belonging to their headman.

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Slavery. Slaves were acquired by capture or purchase, or were received as payment. Prisoners taken by the vassals of one chief in a fight with the partisans of another chief became slaves. Slave raids were also made by the Wayao upon the weaker Axyaaja or again expeditions were sent out hundreds of miles away into the Chipeta country to buy slaves.

[423]

Slaves were a man's goods and chattels, to do with mainly as he pleased, but no man might kill a slave without bringing the case before his chief and obtaining consent. While some were bought and sold and sometimes found their way into a slave caravan bound for the coast, many, perhaps the majority, lived the life of ordinary individuals in the villages. A man who was unhappy in a village and wished to escape from his vassaldom might run away to another village and there commit some act so that he might be claimed as a slave. The custom was to go to the village and sit by the site of a house which had been pulled down after the death of the occupant, and the saying is, "He has been called by the dead man's spirit."

[554]

Many a slave has become an important man in the village and slaves were often the trusted advisers of their chiefs, but there was no means of becoming a freeman. Neither a slave himself nor a second party could purchase his freedom. A slave capturing another man in warfare, for instance, could not ask for his own freedom in exchange for his captive, but anyone so taken became, in a way, the slave of a slave, and the master could not sell the second slave without the permission of the slave captor. An old slave might often be allowed to do just as he pleased and to all intents and purposes was a free man, but he was never actually freed. A slave might earn a return for work done for others than his master; part of this he would probably give to his master, but there was no regular tax upon such earnings.

[582]

The idea in accumulating slaves seems to have been to increase the population of the villages and hence their power and progeny. This is borne out by the fact that marriage between free men and slaves was allowed. Marriage between a free man and a slave woman was unaccompanied by any ceremony and was therefore rather in the nature of recognised concubinage. Such a wife, if unsatisfactory, could be sold out of the village, but generally she was well treated. The children of two slaves were of course born into slavery; the children of a slave woman by a freeman husband, were not quite emancipated, as the father could not remove the child from the village of the slave mother's master, and in very extreme cases, it might be sold by him.

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Women might marry slave husbands and often a master married his daughters to his slave men whom he thought well of. This amounted to a guarantee to the slave that he would never be parted with. A woman with a slave husband could not leave him informally; she could not sell him, inasmuch as women have no property.

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Land Ownership. The ownership of all land was vested in the chief, but he appeared to hold it in surety for all the people over which he ruled. Headmen had no land rights.

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authorities to-day: those of the British administration. Yet the headman is a key official, if usually unpaid, in that administration. For example, he has to report suspicious deaths and illnesses and strangers, and he has to see that his villagers keep the village clean, hoe paths, use latrines, follow agricultural and veterinary regulations, pay tax, &c. He is no more ready than they are to accept these as good, but he tries to enforce the rules for he is liable to be punished if he does not, by fining, imprisonment, and ultimately deposition. As he applies these unwelcome and unaccepted rules, his position becomes subject to still greater strains.

II. THE YAO OF SOUTHERN NYASALAND

J. C. MITCHELL

THE Yao people were notorious at the end of last century because of their reputation as slavers. Livingstone had noted their close association with the Arabs in this trade and much of the effort of the early administrators of Nyasaland was directed to suppressing the slaving activities of the Yao. While the slave trade has been fairly well studied, the associated but different phenomenon of domestic slavery has not been nearly so thoroughly investigated. It seems that domestic slavery was an important part of the Yao social structure in those days, before the coming of the white man abolished at one stroke this and many other social institutions. But, though the institution of domestic slavery ceased to exist, the system of values upon which it was built still survives and still affects the social structure of the modern Yao. We might summarize this system of values by saying that the status of a man depends on the number of people over whom he exercises certain rights and for whom, in turn, he is responsible. In the past, a man could increase his status in the community by acquiring slaves. This he did by buying them with calico obtained through the slave trade, or with ivory, beeswax, tobacco, and other natural products; by taking them in compensation for the death of a relative; or simply by kidnapping them. Slaves were often taken as spouses by the members of the group over which the man exercised his command, or by the man himself as wives, and thus the group was further enlarged by natural increase. Though these slaves and slave-children had fairly well-defined rights, they were not free to leave the command of their owner, and the group was from that point of view a stable one. The leader's command over his matrilineal and other relatives, however, was not so absolute and it is with this aspect of the social structure that I am here concerned. This system of values still persists and forms the basis for evaluating the status of men in the Yao community. The high status of a village headman is usually expressed in such terms as: 'He is a big man—he has many people', or 'he has many huts'. The village headman himself and the men under him are motivated by the same system of values so that in any village at any time there is a balance between the desire of certain members of that village to break away and establish units with their own dependants, and the desire of the headman to retain those people under his charge.

The tensions that exist in this situation are well recognised by the Yao and they always express them explicitly during the ceremonial succession to village headman-